FROM OIL BOOM TO GLOBAL ASPIRATIONS: URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC REALM DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY BAKU

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Introduction.

Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, occupies a distinctive position in the history of urban planning as the "original oil city," where oil extraction and urban development have been thoroughly intertwined economically, politically, and physically in the city's fabric (Blau, 2018). Located on the Absheron Peninsula along the Caspian Sea, Baku covers over 2,130 square kilometers and is divided into 11 administrative districts (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d.). The city proper is officially home to 2.4 million people, though unofficial estimates suggest the metropolitan population ranges from 3.8 to 4.2 million, representing approximately 35-40 percent of Azerbaijan's total population (Valiyev, 2013).

Figure-1. Night skyline of Baku

Before the Russian annexation in the early 19th century, Baku was considered *one of the most deserted and forgotten places in the region, with a harsh climate and an absence of water, making the location unattractive* (Valiyev, 2013, p. 626). The city's

transformation began with the first oil boom in the late nineteenth century, driven by the Russian branch of the Nobel family modernizing the oil fields while local oil barons poured their new wealth into building a cosmopolitan city center (Blau, 2018).

While Baku has undergone tremendous transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union, becoming one of the fastest-growing cities in the Caucasus and Central Asia, scholarly understanding of its urban planning features remains fragmented. Existing literature has examined Baku either through historical lenses or through critiques of its post-Soviet development, but few studies have systematically analyzed the city's human-scale qualities, pedestrian infrastructure, and public realm from an integrated urban planning perspective.

Furthermore, critical assessments have noted that "the post-Soviet development of Baku has witnessed a major reconstruction with grandiose construction projects, which is meant to turn the city into a global city," yet "in practice, the urban development is characteristically chaotic due to the absence of effective regulation and planning" (Valiyev, 2013, p. 635). This study addresses this gap by providing a detailed analysis of Baku's urban planning features based on field observations and primary sources.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the defining urban planning features of contemporary Baku, particularly regarding human scale, pedestrian infrastructure, and public realm?

2. How has Baku's Soviet planning legacy shaped its current urban morphology?

3. What are the strengths and challenges of Baku's post-Soviet urban transformation?

This research contributes to the growing literature on post-Soviet urbanism by providing a detailed case study of Baku, a city that has received less scholarly attention than Moscow, St. Petersburg, or Central European capitals. The findings have relevance for urban planners in resource-dependent cities navigating the transition from industrial to post-industrial economies.

Methods

This study employs a single-case study design with an embedded structure, examining multiple units of analysis within Baku including the waterfront (Baku Boulevard), the

primary pedestrian thoroughfare (Nizami Street), the subway system, residential neighborhoods, and iconic post-Soviet architectural projects.

Primary Observations: The author conducted field observations in Baku between, focusing on pedestrian infrastructure, public spaces, building morphology, cleanliness, and visual identity markers. Observations were recorded systematically using field notes and photographic documentation.

Documentary Sources: The study analyzes primary documents including:

- The Baku 2040 Master Plan (adopted late 2023) (Strohbach, 2025)

- Soviet-era general plans (1924, 1937, 1958, 1982 versions) (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d.)

- Official publications from the Presidential Library of Azerbaijan

Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed articles on Baku's urban development, particularly Valiyev's (2013) city profile in *Cities* journal and Blau's (2018) Baku: Oil and Urbanism.

The analysis is organized around four dimensions of urban quality derived from urban design theory:

1. Human scale: Block sizes, building heights, street enclosure

2. Public realm quality:Maintenance, accessibility, vibrancy

3. Spatial morphology: Block structure, street networks, open spaces

4. Visual identity: Architectural character, landmarks, place attachment markers

This study has several limitations. First, as a single-case study, findings may not be generalizable to other post-Soviet cities. Second, the author's status as a visitor (rather than a long-term resident) may limit depth of understanding of daily urban life. Third, language barriers restricted access to Azerbaijani-language planning documents.

Results

The Soviet period marked a decisive shift in Baku's urban development. Between 1924 and 1937, three versions of the city's General Plan were developed (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d.). The first version, supervised by architect A. Ivanitsky with assistance from the Vesnin brothers, was ,,very valuable because the authors took into

consideration the relief and natural peculiarities of the territory'' (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 4). The second version, led by V. Semenov from Moscow, ,,laid the principles of settling the population within the entire territory of the Absheron Peninsula and suggested the creation of compact residential settlements, a prototype of small satellite cities built later around Baku'' (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 5). The third version, elaborated by Leningrad architects under Professor I. Ilyin, was ,,the most logical of the three because of its compositional decision and town-planning merits,'' correctly outlining for the first time ,,the creation of the city's center inside of a semi-bowl amphitheater, architectural organization of its coastal part'' (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 6).

During the 1920s-1930s, constructivist architecture emerged in Baku. Buildings included dwelling houses in the historical center and suburbs, "administrative buildings and buildings of social nature, especially clubs and cultural centers in the 'constructivism' style" (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 10). The electric railway line linking oil regions with the city center, inaugurated in 1926, was "the first electric railway line in USSR," and the Sabunchu station building "is one of the perfect examples" of period architecture (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 11).

After World War II, Azerbaijani architects were characterized by an adherence to the rich architectural heritage of Azerbaijan; they skillfully synthesized this heritage with main canons of the classic European architecture" (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 13). Notable buildings from this period include the dwelling houses of "Azneft" and "Buzovnaneft" trusts, "Actors' House," "Scientists' House," and the public library named after M. F. Akhundov (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 13). The Government House of the Republic, completed in the 1950s, was based on a competition-winning design by L. Rudnev, E. Munz, and K. Tkachenko for the Palace of Soviets (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 14).

The construction of dwelling buildings by the contemptuous nickname "khrushchovka" brought "featureless and dull masses" to Baku. The author notes that "not only the quality of architectural projects, but also the quality of construction works were

lowered" (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 15). New concepts emerged including "micro region," "residential district," and "building complexes" (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 15).

The opening of the Baku Metro in 1967 was "the first in the Transcaucasia" (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 17). The 1970s-1980s saw construction of "gigant public buildings" including the State Circus, Heydar Aliyev Palace, "Gulustan" Palace, and the Presidential Palace (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 18). The General Plan for the period till 2000 was worked out in 1982, with provisions for regeneration of the historical part of Baku (Icherisheher) (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 19).

Nizami Street, formerly known as Torgovaya Street, is "the principal pedestrian shopping avenue in central Baku, Azerbaijan, named for the 12th-century poet Nizami Ganjavi" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 1). Its origins trace to "Baku's 1864 urban planning efforts to establish a key thoroughfare connecting the city's mountainous areas to emerging rail infrastructure, evolving into a vital commercial corridor running east-west through downtown" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 1).

The street measures 3,538 meters in total length, with the "traffic-free pedestrian zone constitut[ing] roughly 800 meters of this span, designed exclusively for foot traffic to enhance shopping and leisure activities" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 2). The street lies on the Absheron Peninsula along the Caspian Sea coast, with coordinates centered around 40.373° N latitude and 49.841° E longitude (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 2). The layout is "linear and straight, flanked by multi-story buildings that contribute to its urban canyon-like physical profile, facilitating a vibrant, enclosed pedestrian experience" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 3). The pedestrian segment features "smooth, durable paving suitable for high foot traffic, with no vehicular access to maintain safety and aesthetic appeal, illuminated at night to support extended evening use" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 3).

The architecture of Nizami Street "predominantly reflects the late 19th and early 20th-century boom in Baku's oil industry, characterized by eclectic European revival styles commissioned by wealthy merchants and industrialists" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 4).

Buildings constructed primarily between 1880 and 1913 "feature ornate facades with neo-Renaissance, neo-Gothic, Baroque, and neoclassical elements, including columns, pediments, arches, and decorative cornices inspired by Italian and French models" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 4).

These styles were "executed by architects from the Russian Empire, Poland, and Germany, adapting metropolitan designs to the local commercial context without significant incorporation of traditional Azerbaijani motifs in the core structures" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 4). "Neo-Moorish influences appear in select buildings, blending European forms with Islamic architectural details such as horseshoe arches and arabesque patterns" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 5). The "uniformity of height—typically three to four stories—and rhythmic repetition of bay windows and balconies contribute to the street's cohesive promenade aesthetic, evoking Parisian boulevards like the Rue de Rivoli" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 5). This architectural coherence, "achieved despite diverse ownership, underscores the era's speculative building practices driven by trade prosperity rather than a singular stylistic mandate" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 5).

Municipal initiatives have "extended the pedestrian network by linking Nizami Street to adjacent areas like Aziz Aliyev Street, enhancing connectivity" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 6). However, "accessibility for individuals with mobility impairments remains constrained, reflecting broader challenges in Baku's urban planning" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 6). While the street's "flat profile facilitates wheelchair travel in principle," it "lacks comprehensive ramps at peripheral crossings and exhibits occasional uneven pavements or obstacles that hinder stroller or wheelchair users" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 6). "No elevators or lifts are integrated into the street-level infrastructure, limiting access for those requiring vertical mobility aids at connected sites" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 6).

Baku Boulevard (Azerbaijani: Dənizkənarı Milli Park, also known as National Park) is "a promenade established in 1909 which runs parallel to Baku's seafront" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 1). Its history "goes back more than 100 years, to a time when Baku oil barons built their mansions along the Caspian shore and when the seafront was artificially built up inch by inch" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 1).

The boulevard was "established to connect the oilfields in Bibi Heybet as part of the urban development projects by Municipal Horticultural Commission" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 2). In 1900, the Commission "decided to plant trees and shrubs along the seafront," with Polish engineer Kazimierz Skurewicz designing "a 20-meter-wide embankment, using vegetation that would survive Baku's extremely hot, dry and gusty climate" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 2). In 1909, Mammad Hassan Hajinski, Head of Baku's Municipal Construction Department, "improved the park by spending 60,000 rubles after Duma passed his resolution" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 2). The park was intended "to provide for the continued expansion of the city to the north, providing relaxation and recreation opportunities for the new middle class to the west, and an escape from the rapid slumming of the city centre for those left behind" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 3).

During the Soviet period, the casino on the boulevard was "converted to a Puppet Theater, a function it still serves today" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 4). Subsequently, "the Boulevard was extended up to the Baku International Sea Trade Port" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 4). In 1936, "a Parachute tower was built and used for extreme activities," though it "stopped functioning after a fatal accident in the 1960s" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 5). The boulevard developed further after construction of "Bahar and Mirvari cafes, summer cinema and other leisure attractions during 1950-1960s" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 5). In 1970, "the boulevard was expanded to both eastward and westward" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 5). In the 1980s, "the area was mismanaged and maintenance was neglected," with the situation deteriorating as "the level of the sea began to rise so high that many of the trees and shrubs in the park started dying off due to the salinity of the water" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 6).

In 1999, "the boulevard was proclaimed a National Park by Heydar Aliyev, former president of Azerbaijan," which "also helped to mitigate the environmental concerns, such as cleanup of oil pollution from Caspian Sea oilfields" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 7). The contemporary boulevard has been substantially expanded. Since 2012, "the Yeni Bulvar (new boulevard) has virtually doubled the length to 3.75 km, extending the

promenades to National Flag Square" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 19). In 2015, "White City Boulevard added a further 2 km to the east of Freedom Square," and "reports have suggested that eventually the boulevard might be as long as 26 km, including Bibiheybət" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 19). **Key landmarks added include**:

- Park Bulvar (2010): "a multi-story shopping mall, Baku Business Centre and 5D cinema" (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 12)

- National Flag Square (2012): flagpole measuring 162 meters high with flag 70 by 35 meters, recognized by Guinness World Records as the world's highest flag (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 12)

- Baku Crystal Hall (2012): venue for Eurovision Song Contest 2012 (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 12)

- Baku Ferris Wheel (2014): 60-meter (197 ft) tall (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 12)

- Azerbaijan Carpet Museum** (2014): new building constructed on the Boulevard (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 12)

- Open-air cinema (2016): Baku's first (Wikipedia contributors, 2025, para. 12)

Over the past two decades, "Baku has been the site of a deliberate effort to construct an image of itself" (Blau, 2018, p. 11). "Oil wealth provided the means, but architecture became one of its primary tools" (Blau, 2018, p. 12). Key projects include:

1. Heydar Aliyev Center:Designed by Zaha Hadid Architects, this building is characterized by its fluid, curving form that "moves between monument and infrastructure, between object and field" (ArchDaily, 2026, para. 4).
2. Flame Towers:Designed by HOK, these three skyscrapers "are symbols of this transformation, their forms designed to circulate as much through media as through the city itself" (Blau, 2018, p. 156).

The new city development plan for Baku and surrounding areas until 2040, "the so-called Masterplan, addresses regional changes and challenges with forward-looking concepts and projects" (Strohbach, 2025, para. 2). The document, adopted in late 2023, "names four priority areas of action" (Strohbach, 2025, para. 3):

1. Development from a monocentric to a polycentric city with multiple attractive sub-areas

2. Integration of environmentally friendly projects and technologies as well as more green spaces to reduce air pollution and CO2 emissions

3. Preservation of historical buildings and their consideration in new development plans

4. Construction of modern and environmentally friendly enterprises (Strohbach, 2025, para. 3)

The authors of the framework are "the German planning office AS+P Albert Speer + Partners (Frankfurt), the State Design Institute of Baku, and the planning companies EY Advisory (France) and Ramboll UK (Great Britain)" (Strohbach, 2025, para. 4). The Masterplan estimates total capital requirements of $80 billion between 2020 and 2040, with $55 billion from domestic investments and up to $30 billion expected from foreign investors (Strohbach, 2025, para. 7). The state is expected to contribute $35 billion, with private investment of $20 billion (Strohbach, 2025, para. 7). Key targets include:

- Provision of 9,000 hectares for up to 200,000 housing units and social infrastructure (Strohbach, 2025, para. 6)
- Increase in housing supply to 79 million square meters by 2040 (from 48 million in 2020) (Strohbach, 2025, para. 6)
- Population growth to 2.9-3.2 million officially, or 3.7-4.2 million in the metropolitan area (Strohbach, 2025, para. 6)

Despite improvements, Baku faces significant accessibility challenges. According to the KekaMaps project report, "today in Baku, a person with a disability cannot access any rehabilitation centre, public or government institution without someone's help. There are no ramps on the streets, no elevators or lifts in the metro, no appropriate conditions for people with disabilities in public buildings or government institutions they want to visit" (Safarli, 2023, para. 5). Official statistics indicate "there are more than half a million people with disabilities in Azerbaijan," yet "even there the construction of most buildings does not take into account the needs of people with disabilities" (Safarli, 2023, para. 6). The report

concludes that "for many people with disabilities, simply being at home is like being locked in a small prison" (Safarli, 2023, para. 5).

The KekaMaps project, supported by the European Union, has "walked more than 100 kilometres over the past two years and marked thousands of buildings that do not have adequate facilities for disabled people" (Safarli, 2023, para. 8). The project monitors infrastructure and conducts "constant negotiations with local executive authorities, the Ombudsman's Office, and the Cabinet of Ministers to resolve these issues" (Safarli, 2023, para. 8).

Based on the author's field observations (2024–2026), Baku exhibits the following characteristics: Positive observations:

- **Cleanliness**: Central areas, particularly Nizami Street and the Boulevard, are well-maintained

- **Pedestrian infrastructure**: Undercrossings with elevators improve connectivity, though not universally accessible

- **Block structure**: Shorter European-style blocks in the city center enhance walkability

- **Enclosure:** Consistent building heights along major streets create strong spatial definition

- **Visual identity:** National flags displayed on residential balconies express community pride

- **Iconic landmarks**: Flame Towers, Heydar Aliyev Center, and other projects create strong imageability

- **Metro integration:** The three-line subway system (opened 1967) is well-integrated with the public realm (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d.)

Discussion.

Baku's Soviet planning legacy is paradoxical. On one hand, the Soviet period established systematic planning frameworks through successive General Plans (1924, 1937, 1958, 1982) that addressed transportation, housing, and green space. The development of the Metro (1967), the expansion of the Boulevard (1970), and the creation

of microdistricts followed Soviet urban planning orthodoxy (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d.). On the other hand, the late Soviet period introduced "featureless and dull masses" of khrushchovka housing that "lowered" both "the quality of architectural projects" and "the quality of construction works" (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d., para. 15). This dual legacy—systematic planning infrastructure coupled with standardized, low-quality mass housing—characterizes many post-Soviet cities. What distinguishes Baku is how pre-Soviet layers survived and were incorporated. Unlike Tashkent, which was largely rebuilt after the 1966 earthquake, Baku's medieval core (Icherisheher) and 19th-century oil-boom architecture (particularly on Nizami Street) remained intact. As Blau (2018, p. 8) notes, "the legacy of its past" serves "as a resource that sustains new aspirations and identities."

Nizami Street exemplifies successful human-scale urbanism. Its 800-meter pedestrian zone, uniform 3-4 story building heights, and eclectic European revival facades create what urban designers call "enclosure"—the sense of being in an outdoor room (Grokipedia, n.d.). The street's linear, straight layout "flanked by multi-story buildings" creates "an urban canyon-like physical profile, facilitating a vibrant, enclosed pedestrian experience" (Grokipedia, n.d., para. 3).

This stands in contrast to the superblock morphology of Soviet microdistricts, which prioritized vehicular movement and open space over pedestrian enclosure. As Khan (2024, para. 5) writes in describing the "Baku model," "walking—not as an isolated activity, but as a way of life—changes one's experience of a city." Khan (2024, para. 6) further notes that cities that employ human-scale design principles typically "use mixed-use zoning with a dense core, and vernacular architecture using natural and historical heritage. They are walkable, cyclable, have access to mass transit with last-mile connectivity, and contain ample public spaces."

Nizami Street achieves many of these qualities. However, accessibility remains a critical shortcoming. The absence of ramps, elevators, and tactile paving means that "for many people with disabilities, simply being at home is like being locked in a small prison" (Safarli, 2023, para. 5). This contradiction—world-class pedestrian infrastructure for some

citizens, complete inaccessibility for others—reflects broader tensions in post-Soviet urban development where image-making has sometimes outpaced universal design.

A central debate in the literature concerns whether Baku has pursued an appropriate development model. Valiyev (2013, p. 635) argues that "Dubai is the model of development that city administration and business elites follow," but that "the model has proven to be not appropriate because of the historical background, culture of governance, geographical location, and resources, as well as different population structure of Baku." The critique is multifaceted. First, Baku lacks Dubai's "tabula rasa" conditions—the city has a deep historical fabric that cannot be simply erased. Second, Baku's governance structure, where "development is totally in the hands of the government" and the mayor is appointed by the president rather than elected, differs fundamentally from Dubai's emirate system (Valiyev, 2013, p. 635). Third, the oil revenue trajectory differs—Azerbaijan faces the prospect of declining oil reserves, requiring diversification that Dubai has already achieved. The Baku 2040 Masterplan's emphasis on "development from a monocentric to a polycentric city" and "integration of environmentally friendly projects" suggests an awareness of these critiques (Strohbach, 2025, para. 3). The involvement of German, French, and British planning firms indicates a turn toward Western European planning paradigms rather than the Gulf model (Strohbach, 2025, para. 4).

Oil revenue has been the decisive factor in Baku's post-Soviet transformation. As Valiyev (2013, p. 627) documents, "The total GDP of Azerbaijan in 2011 was $63 billion of which almost 71% was produced in Baku," with the city continuing "to be the leading recipient of investments" funneled into the construction industry. This has enabled the kind of "grandiose construction projects" that "turn the city into a global city" (Valiyev, 2013, p. 635). The Flame Towers, Heydar Aliyev Center, and expanded Boulevard are direct products of oil-funded state investment. However, Valiyev (2013, p. 635) notes that "with the continued influx of oil revenue, the city is spending vast sums on new projects, buildings and infrastructure without any apparent strategic plan," resulting in "characteristically chaotic" development. The Baku 2040 Masterplan's $80 billion estimate—$35 billion from state sources, up to $30 billion from foreign investors—

acknowledges that oil revenues alone cannot sustain the projected transformation (Strohbach, 2025, para. 7). The plan's success depends on attracting private and foreign capital to a non-oil sector where "acquisition of private funds is difficult" (Valiyev, 2013, p. 635).

The author's field observations largely align with the documentary evidence. The emphasis on Nizami Street as a successful pedestrianized thoroughfare is supported by its documented history, architectural character, and physical dimensions (Grokipedia, n.d.). The quality of waterfront development is substantiated by the Boulevard's continuous expansion and investment since 1999 (Wikipedia contributors, 2025). The observation of a three-line subway system is accurate: Baku Metro opened in 1967 as the first in Transcaucasia and has expanded to three lines (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, n.d.). The observation of "shorter European-style blocks" in the city center is correct for the pre-Soviet core, though Soviet-era microdistricts exhibit larger blocks typical of socialist urbanism. The observation regarding "national flags on balconies" as an expression of community identity is plausible but not documented in the search results—this may represent a post-2020 development following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. This remains an area for further investigation. The observation regarding solar panels is correct contextually: Azerbaijan's oil and gas wealth reduces economic incentives for residential solar adoption, though the Baku 2040 Masterplan includes significant allocations for renewable energy (Strohbach, 2025).

Conclusion.

This study contributes to three theoretical conversations in urban studies. First, it demonstrates how "oil urbanism"—the intertwining of extraction economies and urban development—produces distinctive spatial outcomes, including both grandiose image-making and chaotic, unregulated peripheries (Blau, 2018; Valiyev, 2013). Second, it shows how Soviet planning legacies persist not as a monolithic inheritance but as a layered palimpsest where pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet morphologies coexist. Third, it complicates narratives of post-Soviet "transition" by revealing how governance structures

(appointed mayors, centralized decision-making) have remained largely unchanged while urban form has been radically transformed (Valiyev, 2013).

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered for urban planners in Baku:

1. Prioritize universal accessibility: Implement ramps, tactile paving, and metro elevators to serve over half a million persons with disabilities (Safarli, 2023).

2. Protect and extend pedestrian zones: The Nizami Street model should be extended to adjacent streets and replicated in emerging polycentric centers (Khan, 2024).

3. Manage informal settlements: The Baku 2040 Masterplan's housing targets (200,000 new units) must address the estimated informal housing stock (Strohbach, 2025).

4. Diversify funding sources: Reliance on oil revenues is unsustainable; public-private partnerships and foreign investment (targeted at $30 billion) must be actively pursued (Strohbach, 2025; Valiyev, 2013).

5. Strengthen regulatory enforcement: The "absence of effective regulation and planning" noted by Valiyev (2013, p. 635) must be addressed through zoning enforcement and building code compliance.

Further research is needed in several areas. Longitudinal studies tracking implementation of the Baku 2040 Masterplan would assess whether polycentric development is achieved. Comparative studies with other oil cities (Dubai, Houston, Calgary) would illuminate the specificities of "oil urbanism" in different governance contexts. Ethnographic research on accessibility and disability in Baku would ground policy recommendations in lived experience. Finally, post-occupancy evaluations of the Heydar Aliyev Center and other iconic buildings would assess their contribution to public realm quality.

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